

made its appearance, and the circumstances attending its publication are, as the editor informs us, without precedent in the nineteen years during which this important and most valuable annual has been issued. The sudden death on the Niger of Mr. W. A. Forbes, the late recorder of the literature relating to the mammals, was soon followed by the loss of the help of Mr. Howard Saunders in the arduous work concerning the recording of the literature of the birds. These severe losses have been supplied by Mr. Oldfield Thomas and Mr. R. B. Sharpe. In the records of the fishes Mr. Boulenger has had the assistance of Mr. R. Ogilvie-Grant. Mr. Ridley has handed the recording of the Protozoa over to Mr. W. Saville Kent, and the Myriapod literature has fallen to Mr. I. D. Gibson-Carmichael. It thus happens that of the recorders who, just twenty years ago, assisted Dr. Günther in the arduous undertaking of bringing out the first volume of this work, but one, Dr. E. von Martens, still responds to the editor's call, though happily all of the first recorders still survive to overlook and appreciate the labours of their successors.

The editor apologises for some slight delay in the appearance of the volume, owing to the mechanical difficulties brought about by all these changes, difficulties only to be thoroughly understood by those who have experienced them, and which we trust will not trouble the editor again. It is not without interest to note that nearly two-thirds of this volume is compiled by officers of the Natural History Department of the British Museum; indeed, if we include Dr. E. von Martens' work, and remember that he occupies the position of assistant in the Natural History Museum of Berlin, it would appear that over 600 out of 700 pages have been compiled by writers whose lives are devoted to the subjects about which they write.

The editor has again to thank the British Association for the Advancement of Science and the Government Grant Committee of the Royal Society for kindly aid in assistance of the publication. The number of new genera and sub-genera recorded in this volume is 1015 as against 1438 in the last volume, and it will be remembered that this latter number included 483 new genera made by Haeckel.

Each recorder seems to have executed his share of the work well and painstakingly. The special treatment of the literature of each group is on the lines of that followed in the later volumes of the series. We warmly congratulate the Zoological Record Association on the result of their editor's labours.

*Sketches of North-Western Mongolia.* Vol. IV.—*Ethnographical Materials.* By G. N. Potanin. 1025 pages, with 26 Plates (Russian). (St. Petersburg: Published by the Russian Geographical Society.)

THE first two volumes of this important work contained the results of the journeys by the author in 1876 and 1877. The third, which is in print, will contain the geographical materials collected during the journey of 1879, and the volume we have before us deals with the ethnographical part of the same journey. It begins with an enumeration of the Turkish and Mongolian peoples who inhabit the region: Tartars, Uryankhays, Kirghiz, Durbuts, Darkhats, and Buryats, with the legends current about their origin. There is no general sketch of the populations dealt with; the aim of the author seems to have been to give in this volume a collection of materials, rather than to enter the field of general conclusions. With regard to the former, the present volume is a most valuable one. We find in it interesting facts as to the family, social, and religious life of the inhabitants; a list of names of stars, plants, and animals, together with the beliefs about them, and finally, their legends and folk-lore. Of these, no less than 200 are given, containing a rich and new source of infor-

mation. On almost every one of the 500 pages occupied by these legends and tales one is attracted either by their poetical beauty or by the light they throw on the mythology and popular conceptions of the inhabitants of this border region of Central Asia; while M. Potanin's name is the best warrant for the accuracy of the transcription of the legends reported. However rich this material, one hesitates to say which of the two is more valuable, the folk-lore published, or the annotations which follow them. These last cover 300 pages of small type, and we find there, philological explanations, comparisons with the legends of other Finnish tribes, most valuable materials for comparative mythology, and so on, all being the result of a thorough study of nearly the whole of the Russian literature of the subject, disseminated through periodicals of the most various descriptions. While perusing these invaluable materials one only regrets that the author has not yet been brought to summarise his wide studies and to draw therefrom some conclusions which may enter into the domain of science. In any case a careful index of all matter mentioned in the volume would much facilitate the researches. The plates represent mostly the pictured tambourines of the shamans and the *ongons* (holy pictures and idols) of the Tartars, Uryankhays, and Buryats.

P. K.

#### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

[The Editor does not hold himself responsible for opinions expressed by his correspondents. Neither can he undertake to return, or to correspond with the writers of, rejected manuscripts. No notice is taken of anonymous communications.]

[The Editor urgently requests correspondents to keep their letters as short as possible. The pressure on his space is so great that it is impossible otherwise to insure the appearance even of communications containing interesting and novel facts.]

#### Quintino Sella

IT is proposed to place a bronze wreath on the tomb of the distinguished Italian geologist and statesman, Quintino Sella. English geologists are invited to express their sympathy with their Italian fellow-workers by sending in their names with a small subscription. I have been requested to bring the matter before their notice, and to collect the subscriptions in this country.

THOS. M'KENNY HUGHES

Woodwardian Museum, Cambridge, March 25

#### Electrostatic Measurement of E.M.F.

PERHAPS you will allow me to make known through your columns to those who have from time to time made inquiries concerning my Absolute Sine Electrometer, that, after many months' work, I have satisfactorily concluded a series of experiments with the instrument which was made for Prof. Anthony. When this instrument was finished last year, I made some observations with it which were so unsatisfactory that I did not feel justified in allowing it to be sent to America. I have now, however, removed all the difficulties connected with it, and I uniformly obtain results perfectly consistent one with another. Indeed my difficulties during the last six weeks were due to the fact of my employing cells which were not sufficiently constant, and not to any fault of the electrometer, a fact which I did not realise for some time.

I hope to publish in a few days a full report on the various points connected with the instrument and on the experimental results obtained.

GEORGE M. MINCHIN

Royal Indian Engineering College, Cooper's Hill, March 24

#### Pons' Comet

THIS comet has been visible here some time. I first saw it at 9 p.m. on January 15, but only for two or three minutes, through the clouds. On the following evening (January 16) I saw it well. To the naked eye it looked like a star of the first magnitude seen through a haze; the tail was visible, but not at all conspicuous. In the telescope (4-inch) the head was large, but